

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 2, 2020

The Honorable David P. Ross
Assistant Administrator, Office of Water
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20460

Dear Assistant Administrator Ross:

As you consider Florida's request to assume a Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 program, we, the co-chairs of the Everglades Caucus, urge you to strongly weigh the benefits of a protective, responsive, and streamlined permitting program on the restoration of America's Everglades.

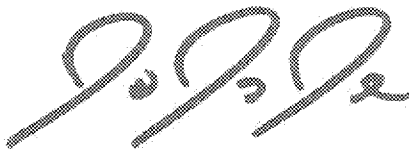
The Everglades is an incredibly vital wetland system in South Florida that provides drinking water to more than 8 million residents and refuge to much of the region's biodiversity. Congress has invested billions of dollars into restoring this national treasure alongside similar investments by the State of Florida.

While important restoration progress has been made in recent years, the overall program has been plagued by design, permitting, and construction delays under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. On several occasions, the State of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District have had to assume responsibility for certain project elements from the Corps of Engineers to expedite project delivery at lower cost.

Expedited construction of the Central Everglades Planning Project, the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir, and other projects around Lake Okeechobee are essential to improving the health of the Everglades ecosystem and enhancing the resilience of the communities that live, work, and recreate there as well. With so much at stake, we can no longer accept unwarranted delays in permitting for ecosystem restoration projects.

With the authority to administer a Section 404 program, we believe that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection would accomplish the task of permitting these critical projects in a significantly more timely and responsive manner than the Corps. Thank you for your full and fair consideration of the State of Florida's request, consistent with applicable statutes and regulations.

Sincerely,



Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER